



Public Lecture

Sacred Substances

How to Construct, Consecrate, and Collect Buddhist Images in Early 20th Century Darjeeling

Berthe Jansen

(Assistant Professor, Leiden University)

January 29, 2025, 6:15 pm

Universität Hamburg, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hauptgebäude (Main Building), Hörsaal M

This presentation has as its starting point a number of works written by Phun tshogs lung rtogs (d. 1926), a non-elite Tibetan scribe who left Tibet to live in India. These articles were written in Tibetan at the request of his employer and student Johan Van Manen (1877-1943), but were never published and are now preserved as part of the Van Manen Collection in Leiden University. These materials, which have yet to receive scholarly attention, provide insight into the processes of making earthen statues, their consecration, restoration, and the handling of other sacred objects. One of Van Manen's final publications entitled *On Making Earthen Images: Repairing Old Images and Drawing Scroll-Pictures in Tibet* (1933) consists of a translation of one of these texts. He explains that his interest in the topic began during his temporary position at the Anthropological and Ethnographic Galleries of the Indian Museum in Calcutta in 1922. While reorganizing the museum's Tibetan collection, he realized he lacked systematic information about the creation of images in all their forms—whether painted, carved, or cast. He therefore asked his Tibetan teacher to gather information on the subject and prepare a “short memorandum” (p. 105), which became the foundation for the 1933 article. Closer examination of the other archived materials shows that this is not entirely accurate, however. This talk explores these Tibetan archival materials and the collaborative study between Phun tshogs lung rtogs and Van Manen, highlighting the significance of this research in the broader context of Van Manen's efforts to collect Himalayan artifacts. This example of engaging with different aspects of the Van Manen Collection helps to demonstrate how a broader study of a collection of texts, artefacts, and (local) contexts can contribute to our understanding—in this case, an understanding of consecration and collecting methods of Buddhist images, as well as of co-operative scholarship related to image-making in the early 20th century in Asia.



Berthe Jansen is Assistant Professor of Tibetan Studies at Leiden University. She is a scholar of Buddhist Studies, specializing in Tibetan social and religious history. She lived in India for five years and graduated from the Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo Translator Programme in Dharmashala in 2005. Thereafter she obtained a BA in Indology at Leiden, an MPhil in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Oxford, and a PhD degree in Buddhist Studies back in Leiden. Jansen had a Dutch government grant (NWO) to research the relationship between Buddhism and law in pre-modern Tibet (2016-2022). She is currently the PI of the ERC-funded project: *Locating Literature, Lived Religion, and Lives in the Himalayas: The Van Manen Collection* (2023-2028). Her monograph *The Monastery Rules: Tibetan Monastic Organization in Pre-modern Tibet* was published in 2018 by University of California Press. In 2023, her first Buddhism-inspired children's book *Don't kill the bugs* came out with Bala Publications. She has worked as an interpreter and translator of Buddhist Tibetan since 2004.